MARS:
SURFER, BLACK BOLT, CRYSTAL, QUICKLY-- FOLLOW MY LEAD...
...AND DON'T HOLD BACK!
KREE SENTRIES AREN'T TOO SMART...
BUT THEY'RE TOUGH AND...
...SUPER ADAPTIVE!
ADAPTIVE TO YER FANCY, FLASHY POWERS, MEBBE...

...BUT IT AIN'T GOT NO DEFENSE 'GAINST BRUTE FORCE.
KRAM
ZZZRAKKK
WHAT IN THE NAME O'..?
GNUFT!!
KRAK
MEDUSA, GET BEN!
EVERYONE ELSE ATTACK... QUICKLY, BEFORE IT CAN REPAIR ITSELF.

KANNG
CAREFUL, JOHN. DON'T GET SO CLOSE.
NOR SHOULD YOU, LITTLE COUSIN.
LET GORGON TEST THE ROBOT'S RESILIENCE.
IT IS CONSIDERABLE...
...I CAN SENSE NO STRUCTURAL WEAKNESS.
THERE... IN THE DUST STORM...SOME SORTA MASSIVE WEAPON...
FIGHTIN' THE SENTRY HAS DISTRACTED US FROM THE *REAL* THREAT...
ONLY MY PRIDE...IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I WUZ IN ACTION...BUT WE'VE ALL BEEN *SUCKERED.*
THEN WE MUST DISMANTLE IT.
BENJAMIN, ARE YOU INJURED?
...AN' IT'S POWERIN' UP!

1 THE F.F. ASTEROID.
...SO THIS GATEWAY OPENS INTO THE NEGATIVE ZONE, WHICH IS LIKE HYPERSPACE...BUT DIFFERENT.
YES...BUT I'M NOT EXPLORING THE ZONE ITSELF--THERE IS A DIMENSIONAL INTERFACE BETWEEN IT AND US...
...A CROSSROADS TO INFINITY, YOU MIGHT SAY.
THE TEMPORAL VARIANCE IS ALMOST ZERO AND IT ISN'T AFFECTED BY THE IMMENSE GRAVITATIONAL FLUXES THAT PLAGUE HYPER-SPACE OR WORMHOLE TRAVEL.
WHICH MEANS YOU CAN TRAVEL ACROSS GREATER DISTANCES WITH LESS POWER.
INFINITELY... ON BOTH COUNTS.
TRAVEL TO ANY-WHERE IN THE UNIVERSE... INSTANTANEOUSLY?
EVENTUALLY... THERE ARE STILL A FEW BUGS TO WORK OUT.
WHAT KIND OF "BUGS"? NOTHING INSURMOUNTABLE?
I DON'T BELIEVE SO... BUT IT WOULD TAKE TIME TO EXPLAIN.
I HAVE TIME...I'D BE HONORED TO STAY AND HELP.
STAY... I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOUR WORK?
ANYONE CAN DO MY JOB, BUT WHAT YOU'RE DOING HERE IS IMPORTANT... YOU SHOULDN'T BE ALONE...
YOU NEED COMPANIONSHIP, REED.
I'M SURE I COULD BE VERY HELPFUL TO YOU.

NO... THAT ISN'T POSSIBLE. I HAVE ALWAYS WORKED ALONE.
YOU WORKED WITH SUE--I CAN DO WHATEVER MENIAL CHORES SHE DID FOR YOU!
NO! SUE DIDN'T JUST MAKE THE COFFEE AND PASS TOOLS...
SHE WAS--IS A BRIGHT, INTELLIGENT WOMAN WHO OFFERED INSIGHT, INSPIRATION AND...
...AND...
...AND I'VE BEEN A BLASTED FOOL TO LET THINGS DEGENERATE BETWEEN US...
I HAVE TO MAKE IT RIGHT.
KUD
TOO LATE FOR THAT, RICHARDS...
...YOUR SICKENING HUMAN SENTIMENTALITY HAS ENDED YOUR USEFULNESS.
NO, PLEASE, VICTOR. THEY'RE JUST CHILDREN!

...THEY'RE JUST CHILDREN!
LET HER GO...
POWER DOWN, FRANKLIN...
POWER DOW--
WHA...
WATER...
...SUBMERSIBLE... IS LEAKING...
THE VIEW PORT-- SHATTERED?
THIS CAN'T BE THE SURFACE... I WAS GOING DEEPER WHEN I PASSED OUT.

I MUST BE UNDER THE OCEAN FLOOR...
...IN SOME SORT OF VOLCANIC CONDUIT.
THE INFLUX OF ICY SEA THAT BROUGHT ME HERE HAS COOLED IT FOR THE MOMENT...
...BUT THAT COULD CHANGE ANY SECOND.
I HAVE TO MOVE QUICKLY.
AGATHA'S TRANSLATION TALKS ABOUT A CITY BENEATH THE SEA, BUT I NEVER THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE UNDER THE OCEAN FLOOR.
I MAY FIND THE CITY YET.
THE SUB AND COMPUTER ARE RUINED--NOT THAT THEY'D BE ANY USE DOWN HERE--
FROM HERE ON, I REALLY AM ON MY OWN.

I CAN'T PUSH THE STORM BACK ANY FURTHER, JOHN.
YOU'RE DOING FINE, BABY.
ME AND NORRIN JUST NEED TO GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO BREAK SOMETHING--
ZRAKK
TOO LATE.
THE BEAM... IT IS *NOT* A WEAPON!
BEYOND THE ORBIT OF DEIMOS... A WORMHOLE FORMS. SOMEONE SEEKS TO BYPASS THE QUARANTINE SHELL.
BY BLACK BOLT'S COMMAND, YOU MUST ALL CEASE COMBAT AND SEEK SHELTER!
ILLOGICAL ACTION-- ANTICIPATE NEW STRATEGY.

VOCAL EMANATION BEYOND ULTRASOUND SCALE...
INITIATING SONIC DEFENSE.
SYSTEM FAILURE...
SYZTUM FELUR...
ZIZOMFELV
IZUKKK--
THRKK
BA-SOOM

SHEESH. THE WHOLE TOWER'S BEEN SLAGGED.
WHAT ABOUT BLACK BOLT?
THERE. HE IS SAFE...
...AND APOLOGIZES FOR THE SEVERITY OF HIS ACTION.
HE DID WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE TO STOP AN INVASION.
I FEAR NOT, JOHN. A SHIP PASSED THROUGH THE WORMHOLE MERE MILLISECONDS BEFORE IT COLLAPSED...
"...THE ENEMY IS *INSIDE* THE SOLAR SYSTEM."

NEPTUNE'S RING.
THE INSERTION HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL. WE WILL SOON REAP OUR REWARDS...
...BUT FIRST, WE HAVE A NEW ASSIGNMENT, DIABLO.
I AM CURIOUS, MAD THINKER...
NO SIGNAL CAN PASS THROUGH THE QUARANTINE FIELD--THAT IS WHY YOUR KREE EMPLOYERS NEEDED US.
NEEDED ME...MY GENIUS.
AND MY ALCHEMIC CREATIONS.
YOUR POINT?
YOU CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH THE KREE SINCE THEY ENLISTED YOU AS AN AGENT.
YOUR INTELLIGENCE IS UNQUESTIONED, BUT YOU HAVE NO PSYCHIC POWERS.
HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITH THE KREE? TELL ME, I MUST KNOW.
IN TIME... BUT FIRST YOU MUST PREPARE ANOTHER VAT OF YOUR EXPLOSIVE DOPPELGANGERS--
THE QUARANTINE FIELD PRESENTS NO OBSTACLE TO MY INTELLECT.
WE ARE TO DESTROY THE S.H.I.E.L.D. ARK.

FAR BELOW THE ATLANTIC...
MACHINERY?!
IT'S IMMENSE--AND STILL FUNCTIONING.
WHICH MEANS IT'S BEING MAINTAINED BY SOMEONE OR...
...SOMETHING!
A BIG SOMETHING!
AND IT HAS A BUNCH OF FRIENDS.
THEY MOVE PRETTY QUICKLY FOR SUBTERRANEAN BEHEMOTHS...

...WHILE I'M LOSING THE MOMENTUM I GAINED DURING MY DESCENT.
I NEED TO FIND A NARROW TUNNEL.
MOLOIDS... AN ARMY OF THEM.
I'M CORNERED.
WHERE ARE THE REST OF YOUR MEDDLING FOURSOME, MRS. RICHARDS?
OR DO YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE YOUR ARRIVAL AT THE MOMENT OF MY GREATEST TRIUMPH TO BE COINCIDENCE?
WHO...?
MOLE MAN? I THOUGHT YOU WERE--
DEAD!? THAT IS WHAT I WANTED YOU TO BELIEVE...WHILE I WORKED ON MY MASTER PLAN...
...TO ELIMINATE ALL LIFE ON THE EARTH'S SURFACE. AND THERE IS NOTHING THAT CAN STOP ME!

THE SURFER IS USING THE TIDAL FORCES IN THE COSMIC ETHER TO DRAG US ALONG IN HIS WAKE-- SO WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLOSE THE GAP WITH THE INSURGENTS BEFORE THEY REACH EARTH.
YOU'RE DOING A TERRIFIC JOB OF MATCHING HIS MANEUVERS, MEDUSA.
IT IS A CHALLENGE.
NO RESPONSE ON ANY COM FREQUENCY-- THE SHIP AHEAD MUST BE BLOCKING US.
WE HAVE TO SCRAMBLE EARTH DEFENSE... THEY'RE SITTIN' DUCKS.
CONTACT REED'S ASTEROID!
THAT WAS OUR FIRST CALL.
REMEMBER WHEN THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR ISOLATED THE BAXTER BUILDING IN A BLACKOUT-FIELD AND REED USED A HYPER-WAVE TO PATCH INTO THE BUILDING'S SECURITY SYSTEM?
YEAH! DO IT, JOHN... DO IT!
ALREADY DONE...JUST RUNNING THROUGH THE SYSTEM TO FIND REE--
UH-OH!

I WAITED FOR YOU TO AWAKEN...
...SO YOU WOULD KNOW THE SUPER-SKRULL HAD BESTED YOU!
SUPER... PAH!
YOU'RE JUST A PATHETIC IMITATION OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
LAST I HEARD, YOUR CONTINUAL INCOMPETENCE HAD RESULTED IN YOUR EXILE.
YOU ARE TRYING TO [illegible] ME. I KNOW THAT. IT IS ONE OF THE TRICKS YOU USED TO DEFEAT [illegible] IN THE PAST.
BUT I HAVE LEARNED-- AND MY VICTORY OVER YOU THIS DAY WILL [illegible] RESTORED AS THE FAVORITE OF THE EMPEROR--FIRST AMONG ALL SKRULLKIND.
[illegible] WON'T WIN YOU ANY BROWNIE POINTS WITH YOUR EMPEROR.
NO... BUT YOUR TRANSIT-GATE TECHNOLOGY WILL!
WHEN THE QUARANTINE FIELD WAS RAISED AROUND THE SOL SYSTEM, THE EMPEROR BECAME OBSESSED WITH WHAT TECHNOLOGY YOU MIGHT DEVELOP IN SECRET.
I LEFT THE HOMEWORLD FOR EARTH.

"I SPENT YEARS HIBERNATING IN A POWERLESS LIFE-POD...
"...AND PASSED THROUGH THE QUARANTINE SHELL AMID A DRIFT OF STELLAR DETRITUS.
"THEN I USED MY SHAPE-CHANGING SKILLS TO PASS AMONG HUMANKIND UNTIL I DISCOVERED HOW TO GAIN ACCESS TO YOUR ASTEROID...
"ONCE HERE, I BECAME AN ANONYMOUS H.R.B.
"SO MANY TIMES I THOUGHT TO KILL YOU...BUT INSTEAD I WAITED AND STUDIED... AND WAITED...
"...UNTIL YOU YOURSELF DIVULGED YOUR SECRETS TO ME."
AND WITH YOUR PUNY APPEARANCE AND REPUTATION, IT WILL BE A SIMPLE MATTER TO DELIVER IT ALL TO MY EMPEROR.
SO THE ONLY REMAINING DETAIL IS TO DISPOSE OF YOUR BODY.
A MOST FITTING END... DISPATCHED BY YOUR OWN CREATION.

GOT TO GET LEVERAGE...
...MY ONE CHANCE IS WHEN THIS CUBE HITS THE DISTORTION ZONE...
...THE BOX SHOULD WARP SLIGHTLY...
...JUST ENOUGH TO FORCE A GAP.
THEN WE'LL SEE WHO HAS THE LAST LAUGH!
WHU../?
NO... NO... RELEASE ME--
YOU WANTED TO KNOW THE SECRETS OF THE GATE, SUPER-SKRULL..?

...WELCOME TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
REED ISN'T COMING OUT ON HIS OWN...
WE'VE GOT TO GET THERE FAST!
I FIGGERED WE WUZ CHASING THE KREE--BUT NOW THE SKRULLS ARE INVOLVED...
AN' WHAT ABOUT THE QUARANTINE? AIN'T NONE OF THOSE ALIENS SUPPOSED T'BE HERE--THIS ■ BAD!

WHAT IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT'S HOLY HAS REED GOT HISSELF INTO?
EASY, BEN... DON'T WRECK THE EQUIPMENT.
YEAH... OKAY...I'M SORRY.
THIS IS THE FIRST CRISIS SINCE-- Y'KNOW...
...DOOM.
AN' IT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE LEFT ALICIA AND THE KIDS!
MEBBE IF I DIDN'T HAVE SO MUCH TIME TO THINK--
--TO THINK ABOUT WHAT MIGHT GO WRONG.
WE'LL WORK THIS OUT, BEN. AS A WISE OLD LUMPY ORANGE FRIEND ONCE SAID TO ME...
"IT AIN'T OVER TILL WE'RE DONE."
THANKS, BUDDY.
THE SHIP WE PURSUE IS ON APPROACH TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR ASTEROID. JUDGING BY THE TRAJECTORY...
...IT WILL DOCK AT ONE OF THE STARBOARD AXIS BAYS.
WE ARE STILL MORE THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES AWAY.
CAN Y'GET A VISUAL, JOHN?
SEE IF THEY'RE KREE.
YEAH... JUST LET ME FIND THE RIGHT FEED.
AW, NO...

"...THEY'RE KREE--RONAN AND A SQUAD OF TROOPS. BUT THEY HAVE SOME HEAVY-DUTY HELP...
"...THE SH'IAR IMPERIAL GUARD."
THE POWER TO CONTROL THE UNIVERSE WILL BE OURS--BROOK NO OPPOSITION.
NO... RICHARDS, DON'T LET ME GO...HAVE MERCY.
YOU'RE THE GREAT SUPER-SKRULL... YOU DON'T NEED MY HELP.
AND I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO SAVE ANYONE...
...INCLUDING MYSELF...UNTIL I FREE MYSELF--
SKASH
UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES I'D EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE...
...BUT I KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE YOU EVIL BRUTES ARE MINDLESS DRONES...

...BUT YOUR ACTIVITY COULD DRAW ATTENTION TO MY ARRIVAL...
...SO I'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE FAST.
GAAAH!
VLOK!
YOU ARE A FOOL TO THINK YOU CAN ESCAPE, RICHARDS...
NOTHING EXISTS IN THIS REALM SAVE BY THE WILL OF ANNIHILUS.
YOUR PRESENCE HERE IS NOT CHANCE--
--BUT BY MY PLAN!
To be continued...

A Legend Among Heroes

Dave Cockrum

1943 - 2006